

RVC Response to Student Death Policy and Procedure

Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to:

- Ensure a properly coordinated, timely and appropriate level of response by the RVC
- Ensure that the RVC communicates effectively with the family and all public authorities involved in the incident
- Ensure that the RVC provides appropriate support to those in our community affected by the student death
- Set out the administrative responsibilities in the event of the death of a student member

Scope

This policy covers all RVC students.

Procedure

The response can be broken down into 3 main areas:

- 1) Notification of death
- 2) First response and ongoing actions
- 3) Reflection and review

1) Notification of death

On campus

If you find someone who you think has died, unless it is absolutely clear that they are beyond medical help, you should call an ambulance immediately on 999, attempt first aid/resuscitation if you are able to and inform Security on 01707 66 6258 (for Hawkshead or out of hours incidents) or 020 7468 5121 (Camden) who can attend the scene to support, request first aid support and co-ordinate access for the emergency services.

If it is clear that the person has died, do not touch the body or the surroundings. Contact the police and ambulance on 999 and then contact Security on 01707 66 6258 (for Hawkshead or out of hours incidents) or 020 7468 5121 (Camden). Security will notify the Director of Learning and Wellbeing/Head of the Advice Centre, co-ordinate access for the emergency services and help secure the area to ensure nothing is disturbed and that any other people in the vicinity are comfortable until the police arrive. If the witnesses are unable to wait their details should be taken so that support can be offered and so that the police can speak with them. The emergency services will be responsible for removal of the body and notifying the next of kin.

In all other (non-emergency) circumstances if you are notified of a student death you should report as follows:

Student death

Report the death to the Director of Learning and Wellbeing and Head of the Advice Centre.

Michele Milner, Director of Learning and Wellbeing mmilner@rvc.ac.uk 07970181364

Steve Short, Head of the Advice Centre sshort@rvc.ac.uk, 020 3905 4795

If it is urgent, we recommend calling rather than emailing. If you cannot get the Director of Learning and Wellbeing or the Head of the Advice Centre please contact the Advice Centre on 020 8051 3501

Please provide the following details (as far as possible):

- Name of the student
- Student number (if known)
- Course of study
- Manner of death (if known)
- Location of death (if known)
- The source from which you have been notified of the death
- Whether parents/ family/next of kin are already aware
- If they are aware let us know if parents/ family/next of kin would like us to contact them

In the event of notification of the death of an alumni the matter should be referred to External Relations who will manage any necessary actions including:

- Liaison with the family
- Writing to the family, using embossed RVC crested stationery (cards).
- Inform Principal if ex staff or long service staff member or alumnus known at RVC
- In memoriam section of Eclipse magazine – name listed or obituary written.
- Notification on 'Message of the Day' with details, notification and any funeral arrangements.
- Removing them from CRM systems.

2) First response (24 hours) and ongoing review

Once the report has been received by the Director of Learning and Wellbeing/Head of the Advice Centre a case conference meeting may be set up with identified staff depending on the nature of the case to consider issues such as:

- Establishing the facts of the situation
- Supporting Emergency Services (if appropriate)
- Maintaining campus security (if death on campus)
- Gathering information about the student and those who knew them
- Providing appropriate immediate support
- Creating a clear notification and communication plan for the RVC community

The meeting will be set up as soon as possible following notification using whatever means best facilitates it. The attendees at the case conference meeting will be dependent on the case but is likely to include the following roles (or their nominees):

- Director of Learning and Wellbeing
- Head of the Advice Centre
- Registrar
- Vice Principal (Students)
- Director of Estates
- Director of External Relations
- Course Director
- Head of Department/Senior Tutor
- Chaplain

In all cases the following actions will be taken:

Action	Responsible person
Notify Chief Operating Officer (COO) providing them with the details available at that stage.	Director of Learning and Wellbeing to contact COO.
Notify Principal providing with relevant details at this stage.	COO to contact Principal
Agree with COO who will contact family/next of kin. Act as a point of contact for COO and also liaise with other parties on their behalf where appropriate.	Director of Learning and Wellbeing and COO to agree. Director of Learning and Wellbeing or nominee.
In the case of a suicide or other suspicious/traumatic death there is likely to be a need for a named liaison person for police and the media.	Director of Learning and Wellbeing, Director of External Relations and COO to agree named liaisons for media and police and communicate this to PAG, relevant colleagues, including the Students Union.
Ensure CEC/ Course Director/Academic Department/Professional Service is informed (usually to the Senior Tutor/Head of Department). Make the Course Director/Academic Department aware of how contact with the family will proceed and who the liaison contacts are in the event of any enquiries coming directly to the department or service. <i>Act as a point of liaison for the Academic Department</i>	Director of Learning and Wellbeing or nominated representative.

<p>Notify other areas of the RVC e.g. Advice Centre, Chaplain, Accommodation (if applicable) Security, Academic Registry (who can update the students record), and Students Union</p>	<p>Director of Learning and Wellbeing or nominated representative</p>
<p>Agree wording of emails/comms as appropriate with the COO and the Principal</p> <p>Prepare notices and communications to go to students, staff and student and staff noticeboards</p> <p>Wording of notices can also be checked with the Chaplain to ensure they are culturally appropriate.</p>	<p>Director of External Relations, Director of Learning and Wellbeing/Head of the Advice Centre, Director of HR to liaise with family and agree notice to students.</p>
<p>Coordinate support for staff and students affected, giving clear information on how the support can be accessed.</p>	<p>Director of Learning and Wellbeing and Director of HR (or nominees) to liaise with relevant parties</p> <p>Support can be offered by Advice Centre, Chaplain and HR.</p> <p>Director of Learning and Wellbeing/Head of Advice Centre, Director of HR to ensure any appropriate third parties are notified.</p>
<p>Act as main liaison with family throughout the initial response and ongoing</p> <p><i>After contact with the family/next of kin is made, the offer is made of a Book of Remembrance and contact with the Chaplain.</i></p> <p><i>Make the student's work and academic progress information available to the family.</i></p> <p>Arrange any visits to campus including working with colleagues in Estates to accommodate the family on campus if they wish to stay.</p>	<p>Director of Learning and Wellbeing/Head of the Advice Centre/Chaplain</p>
<p>Advise the Chair of Council, Chair of Audit & Risk Committee and, when appropriate Council as a whole.</p> <p>As appropriate, provide further updates on the circumstances of the death and how it is being managed.</p>	<p>Principal/Secretary to Council</p>

Note: Many of these actions are likely to be occurring in parallel in real time

4) **72 hours review**

A review meeting should be arranged within 72 hours to review steps taken, look at what else needs to be done and plan next steps moving forward. Appendix 1 provides a checklist with additional guidance for attendees of a case conference meeting to work through.

Appendices 2 and 3 contain best practice guidance from Universities UK and Samaritans on suicide postvention to help guide appropriate action.

5) **Reflection and review meeting**

It is important that once all actions have been completed and the case has been managed that time is taken to reflect on whether there are any lessons to learn and improvements to the process to be made. It is also useful to review to ensure all colleagues involved in the process have a chance to debrief and are offered appropriate support. The Director of Learning and Wellbeing/Head of the Advice Centre will convene a review meeting with relevant staff to explore the above.

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Section responsible for policy maintenance and review	Learning and Wellbeing
Contact	Steve Short Head of the Advice Centre

Appendix 2 - Response to student death checklist and supporting guidance

(Note – timing of specific actions will be dependent on the specific situation and the table does not necessarily imply a specific order of actions but rather issues to consider.)

Issue to consider	Supplementary questions	Action/further information
Was the death on campus?	Follow advice from emergency services. Is the scene secure? Are there any immediate practical steps needed to rehome any students? Have we arranged for student's belongings to be collected by family?	
Is the family aware?	<p>Named contact to get in touch with the family to break the news and offer support. Police may wish to be the lead in contacting family/emergency contact – if this is the case a university contact still needs to call and perhaps share their contact details with police for the family.</p> <p>Important to liaise with the family about their wishes and ensure they are happy with any planned communication to the RVC community</p>	The AVMA guidance After a Suicide: A Toolkit for Colleges of Veterinary Medicine contains a useful checklist of things to cover when contacting the family.
Have we identified students who were friends with the deceased or affected by the incident?	<p>Create a list of students. Consider whether the news should be given to a cohort or other small group in person by Head of Department with support from the Advice Centre</p> <p>Check the list for any students who are already known to support services who may be more at risk and contact those students directly to offer face to face support.</p> <p>Examples of high risk groups and individuals include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • siblings and friends • accidental and/or intentional first responders or individual(s) who discovered body 	Clinical interventions should promote psycho-education (for example, informing students about common and typical reactions following a suicide and conveying to students that there is not one way to grieve and the time it takes for someone to return to normal after a death or crisis varies)

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • staff who knew the deceased student or have dealt with other campus tragedies • professional services staff who knew deceased student • student services staff that may have had close relationship with individual(s) • students who have a history of previous suicide attempts • students in the same accommodation • students in the same club/student activity • students on the same sports team <p>Send follow up email to them giving them details of support services.</p>	
Is the department aware?	Discuss with Head of Department or relevant senior colleague the best way to break the news to students. This should involve communications being sent out and informing the student's direct cohort face to face if possible.	
Is Academic Registry/Student Records aware?	Important that they are notified so they can update the students record and ensure that no further communications are sent out that could cause distress.	
Inform External Relations	Director of External Relations to support with the internal and external communication of the student's death (with input from Senior Management) and co-ordinate any communication with the media.	Samaritans have useful information on handling the media .
Inform Chaplain	Chaplain can offer support to those affected and be involved in planning around any 'book of remembrance' and consider whether any 'service or memorial' may be offered.	

Appendix 3 - UUK Suicide Safer Universities guidance

- Contact the bereaved, offering to meet and provide compassionate support
- Support affected students and staff: ensure individual approaches for anyone identified as being at risk of contagion, including rapid referral for community mental health support where and when needed
- Agree internal communications, including for staff and students, as appropriate
- Consider the legacy and anniversaries; find the best way to celebrate the life of the deceased, without glamorising suicide
- Alert local and public health services, as appropriate
- Be prepared for external communications, and support the media in delivering sensitive reporting of suicide. Call out bad behaviour.
- Provide information on available support
- Support continuous quality improvement of suicide prevention strategies and action plans. Facilitate research, data collection and monitoring to get to the bottom of what has happened, and the lessons learned through carrying out a serious incident review
- Consider holding open meetings with affected communities e.g. students in a particular year group or student halls

SPEAKING WITH THE FAMILY OR NAMED OTHERS

Consult them on the best ways of communicating: how much, how often, who should be involved and how. Consider whether a distinct approach to communications may be needed if the deceased was an international student.

COMMUNICATING SUSPECTED SUICIDE

The cause of death may not be formally established for days or weeks. It might be helpful for your communications at this time to refer to 'suspected suicide' to enable conversations. Ensure that you are addressing any rumours that might be spreading, without sharing details about the death.

WHO IS AFFECTED? Consider whether support services staff who have had previous interactions with the bereaved will be able to provide bereavement support. Additional support may be required for other staff, such as campus security or cleaning staff, if the incident happened on campus.

HANDLING THE MEDIA – Who will be your spokesperson? – How will others know who the spokesperson is? – How will communications be disseminated? – How will the next of kin be consulted or kept informed?

HANDLING SOCIAL MEDIA Owing to the widespread use of social media, information about a suicide might spread quickly and it might be inaccurate. People responsible for communications should consider this, and encourage people to limit their use of social media communications and be ready to communicate themselves quickly. Consider monitoring social media discussions of the death and respond in real time if necessary to correct misinformation/advise against potentially harmful posts.

THE LESSONS LEARNED Every situation will be different, and it will be important to keep learning from your communities and share your experiences of best practice and knowledge with others.

Appendix 4 - Samaritans guidance on suicide postvention

The Samaritans have detailed good practice guidance for HEI's available at <https://www.samaritans.org/how-we-can-help/schools/universities/>

Communicating sensitively and appropriately about suicide

Suicide is complex. There is never a single reason or circumstance that leads to a person taking their own life.

Time and consideration should be given to how and when to communicate information, to whom, what to include and where information should be shared.

When discussing any suspected suicide, it is strongly recommended the information given:

- is factually correct but does not include detail of the suicide or the method used
- does not romanticise, glorify or vilify the death
- does not include details of any suicide note
- does not include speculation over the motive for suicide
- includes messages of hope (eg talking helps)
- focuses on the person and where those affected can find support and help should they need it

Memorials information

Following any death, there is a natural wish to pay tribute to the person who has died. After a suspected suicide, there's a need for careful planning and management of any memorial.

It is important to acknowledge the desire for the memorial but also to recognise the potential risk of glamorising or sensationalising a death rumoured or known to be by suicide.

Temporary memorials

Some people will want leave flowers, messages or other mementos. The institution can take partial control of this by choosing the place where a memorial is sited. Placement of any flowers or memorials needs careful consideration. Temporary memorials should not be placed at the location of the death or in a place that is very public.

Samaritans' Step by Step service can provide further support and information about memorials.

Social media and online memorials

Institutions cannot control online memorials and other social networking activity following a suspected suicide.

However, staff and students should be warned about the risks of inappropriate messages, warning signs to look out for, what to do if you are concerned with a post or message, and the benefits of online memorials.

Information about memorialised accounts on Facebook can be found [here](#)

Some points for consideration to enable a safe response to a suicide and reduce the risk of contagion are:

- educate the community about safe messages and using social networks responsibly
- send out messages signposting to support both within and outside of the university
- link to online resources about coping strategies, self-help and encouraging help-seeking behaviour
- set up a memorial page that is monitored by students or support staff

Guidance on responding to suicidal content online can be found [here](#).